

## “Not as the World Gives”

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter

John 14:23-29

May 9, 2010

If I were to ask you to describe what you need in your life right now in order to remove your stress, or alleviate your anxiety, or even to bring you into a state of peace, what would that be? Would it be something that would end the conflict in your life? Maybe it might be finding a consensus of opinion over issues that have caused strain on a relationship? Or perhaps it would be extra cash at the end of the month that never seems to be there? I suspect that we would all answer the question differently.

What would you say if I were to tell you that the peace we want is not found in those places and things that we pursue? That peace, true peace, is found in that place from which we run, from those things we choose to ignore, from all that frightens us.

I know that I have told you that peace, real peace, the kind of peace the Word of God describes is having a sense of wellbeing in the midst of chaos. Peace does not mean the removal of conflict. What I have not told you is how one gets there, how we get to that sense of wellbeing. I have not shared with you what it is that we must do in order to help ourselves move from a state of anxiety to a state of peace, from conflict to resolution, or from fear to confidence.

Having reread the Gospel of John, focusing on how Jesus addressed this topic, and having looked at the Biblical writers as to how they use the word “peace”, my conclusion is as follows:

***Peace occurs as we overcome our fear! Peace happens when we have the courage to face that which makes us afraid!***

Life can be filled with chaos and yet, when fear is faced, we feel at peace. Life can be filled with turbulent change (stock market, real estate values, lay-offs, etc.). And yet when courage has been summoned to face down that which frightens us, peace is achieved. The summoning of courage is not easy to do. After all, it must be done in the face of our fears, our worries, and our uncertainties.

Looking over history and reflecting on the past acts of courage, not a lot has changed. From the time of the ancient Greek culture to the time of our lives there has been little change. So often we hear and told to muster courage, to be brave, to be strong, to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We look at past heroes who seem to have done just that and we try to imitate them and their actions. We try to act with courage as they did. How often do we get caught up in a story of a hero who displays great courage? If only we could be like that person?

The Greek people believed courage came from what lay inside of one self. It was something that was understood in terms of imitation. The Greek would seek to imitate the same kind of courage believed to exist in their gods. They would then try to imitate them. Not too terribly different from today, wouldn't you say?

The difference in John's gospel is that it is Jesus himself who, on the basis of his victory won through the crucifixion and resurrection, issues the summons to courage. Here we have a summons to courage

rooted in history and not myth, founded on fulfillment and not yearning. Christ, through the Holy Spirit, enables us to face the fears that cause us our anxiety and the end result is peace.

Take for example when Jesus said to the paralytic: "Have courage, pick up your pallet and walk." Or when Jesus walking on the water during a storm says; "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." And when Paul was in prison Jesus came to visit him and said, "Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome."

God gives us the Holy Spirit to help summon the courage we need in order to trust in Jesus and, therefore, achieve peace.

***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."***

Unlike the ancient Greeks, and unlike popular opinion, the ability to summon the courage we need is given to us through the presence of God in our life by the Holy Spirit and is realized in acts of faith.

If you find yourself facing an anxious time right now perhaps the question you ought to be asking is "Of what am I afraid?" What is it that you're trying to avoid, ignore, or simply resist doing? It could possibly be the very thing that is keeping you from peace. And also ask what is God trying to tell you in this moment of fear, anxiety, or stress? Maybe God is summoning you to trust in His presence, to yield your will to His, or to cast all your cares on him and He will sustain you?

In order to bring peace, Jesus challenges us to trust in His presence, to believe. Doing so we are then helped to face our fear, to trust in his word, and to have courage. Doing so we will find peace, not as the world gives, but a peace that which is lasting.

AMEN